

**NMFS CHARTERBOAT SURVEYS IN THE SOUTHEAST UNITED STATES;
PROGRESS, PROBLEMS, AND PLANS**

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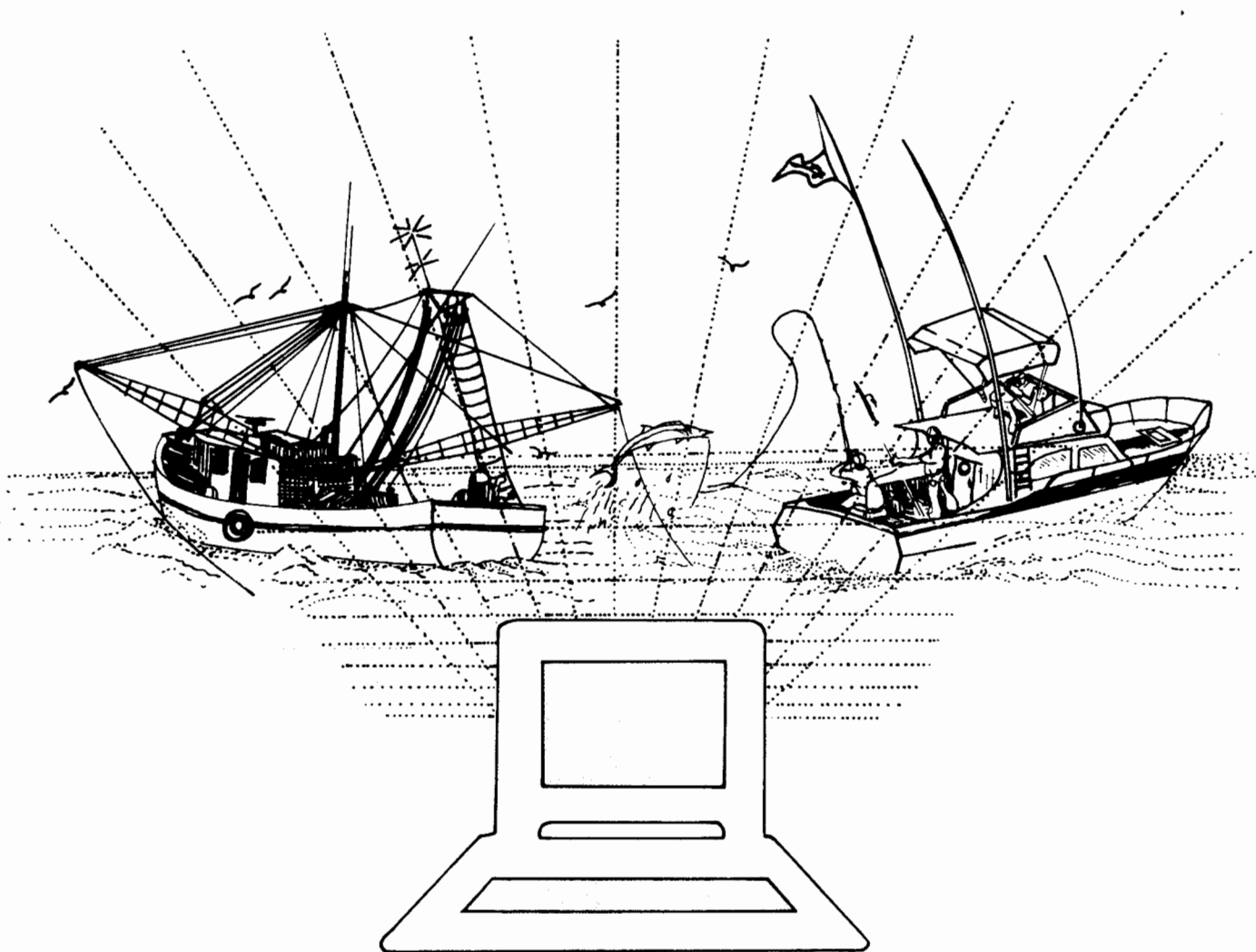
ABSTRACT Personnel of the Panama City Laboratory of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have been involved in surveys to determine catch per unit effort (CPUE) in recreational fisheries since 1975. Three different types of surveys have been conducted and evaluating methods of obtaining CPUE data from charter boats was one of the goals of each. An objective of the first survey, conducted in Bay County, Florida, during 1975, was to test methods for increasing the response rate to mailed questionnaires. Postal cards were used to sample charterboats' CPUE of king mackerel. Methods used to promote the survey and enhance response rates were: (a) a prize system, (b) person to person contact, and (c) television, radio, and newspaper advertising; the charterboat response rate was 58 percent. The second survey was conducted to obtain CPUE on the most abundant species of fishes caught by charterboats in the northeast Gulf of Mexico; we placed log books on 91 boats and promoted the survey with 1975's prize system and remote (telephone and mail) communication. After six months, response rate declined to 24 percent overall and to 0 percent in some of the areas, so the survey was discontinued. The third survey, initiated in 1982 and ongoing, seeks to obtain daily CPUE data on all species caught by charterboats from North Carolina to Texas and in the U.S. Caribbean. In 1982 nine charterboat captains were contracted for \$100 per month to maintain daily logs and return the logs weekly; over 90 percent of the logs were returned. In 1983 the southeast United States was divided into 16 areas, including the U.S. Caribbean, and 100 boats were contracted for \$50 per month; over 94 percent of the logs were returned. In 1984 31 boats in eight areas were contracted and in addition several captains who were in the 1983 survey volunteered to maintain and submit logs without reimbursement. Contractors returned over 94 percent and volunteers over 50 percent of the logs after three months.

The goals of our contractual survey in 1983-1984 were to develop more efficient methods of conducting the survey, to evaluate costs, and to obtain CPUE data on several species over a broad geographic area from charterboats and to provide quick turnaround of these data. Methods to improve efficiency involved sample frame development and promotion of the survey. The population that we sampled was defined as all charterboat captains that volunteered to contract with us to provide CPUE data. This population was defined by contacting all captains that we were aware of, determining their interest, and obtaining a letter of intent; from this list the selections were made and the contractual agreements were made. High response rate is usually required if survey methods are to be efficient. High rates were maintained in our survey by (a) paying a fee, (b) maintaining frequency communications via telephone and a monthly newsletter, and (c) by quick provision of updated information. Further, the data were published within two months of the end of each survey year. Estimated costs to run the 100-boat survey in 1983 totaled \$96.3 thousand for about 27,000 logged days: total costs in thousands of dollars by category were: contracts, 46.8; salaries, 41.0; supplies, 6.5; and

communications, 2.0. Data obtained from the surveys provided for the first time a standard data base to evaluate species composition and relative abundance among areas in the southeast United States and generated a data base for comparing abundance among years. Future plans of the survey include the evaluation of mandatory reporting as a method of obtaining catch and effort data from random samples of charterboat captains in the southeast United States.

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